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MARINE CORPS TRADITIONS

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No structure is stronger than its foundation; and the foundation of the United States Marine Corps is a body of tradition deeply entrenched in the soil of our country. During the period from 1775 to the present day, Marines developed, maintained and perpetuated many fine traditions: traditions of loyalty, courage, and honor; traditions of self-sacrifice, and unstinted devotion to duty; traditions of uniform, insignia, flags, and equipment.

These traditions were not developed by orators or propagandists. They are the result of well authenticated events in the history of a service as old as the nation. Heritages of the modern Marine are traditions of loyalty unexcelled marksmanship, pride of appearance, and discipline.

There are many questions which arise in the minds of those who come into contact with Marines. Why do men enlist in the Marine Corps? Why do so many of them spend their whole working lives in this service without thought of great financial reward? Why do they cling so tenaciously to certain uniforms, devices, songs, and slogans? Recently, the members of a Marine Corps Reserve Battalion was asked the question: "Why did you enlist in the Marine Corps Reserve?" The answer by a decisive majority was: "Because of the Marine Corps traditions."

In the course of its more than 172 years of existence,

the Marine Corps has developed many fine traditions. There are traditions relating to the employment of Marines "in the air, and land and sea," traditions of the uniform, and traditions exemplifying their physical, mental, and moral qualities. These traditions being to light the out of the way places of the world. They account for the Corps' famed Mameluke sword, which is patterned after the sword presented to Lieutenant Presley N. O'Bannon by the Bashaw of Tripoli in 1805. And they exemplify the best in human character.

The "Globe and Anchor" Emblem symbolizes the diversified employment of the Marines. The Marines' Hymn expresses it in words. And their motto, Semper Fidelis ("Always Faithful"), is a guarantee that the job will be done well. Our expeditionary forces in France, in World War I, contained officers and men fresh from ships, Santo Domingo, Haiti, Nicaragua, Guam, the Philippines, and China. As you read the history of the Marine Corps the appropriateness of its emblem is apparent.

Marines have carried our country's flag to the far corners of the world, where their exemplary conduct has earned for it the respect and honor of all nations. They carried the Grand Union Flag ashore in the Bahamas in March 1776 on their first landing expedition on foreign soil. Their marksmanship kept the flag flying in the famous sea fight between the BONHOMME RICHARD and the SERAPIS, in 1779, when John Paul Jones made his defiant reply: "I have not yet begun to

fight". They carried their country's Flag "to the shores of Tripoli" and hoisted it over the fortress at Derne in April 1805, the first time our flag was flown over a citadel of the Old World. They took part in the defense of Fort McHenry in 1814, which inspired Francis Scott Key to write the immortal words of the Star-Spangled Banner. They planted the flag in California in 1846, and the next year hoisted the U. S. flag over the "Halls of Montezuma" in Mexico City. In addition to the national flag, they carried their own standard, with an artistically painted design in scarlet, gold and blue, the traditional colors of the Marines. Before departing for Mexico they changed the words across the top of the flag from "To the Shores of Tripoli" to "From Tripoli to the Halls of the Montezumas," which, it is conjectured, inspired an unknown Marine to compose the first verse of the famous Marines' Hymn and sing it to the tune of an old Spanish folk-song, then believed to have been a favorite in Mexico City. They planted the flag on the ramparts of the Korean forts on the Salee River, in 1871. They unfurled the National Flag at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in June 1898, and two years later took part in the special ceremonies incident to raising the Stars and Stripes over American Samoa. As a part of the Allied Relief Expedition to raise the siege of the Allied Legations in China during the Boxer Rebellion, they raised the U. S. flag over the Walled City of Tientsin in July

1900, and over Pekin's Chien Men Gate in August 1900 as a signal to the other Allied forces that the Imperial City had fallen. They raised the national flag over Vera Cruz, Mexico, in April 1914, and carried it to France, in 1918. In August 1942, the Marines of the 1st Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, carried the flag to Guadalcanal, in the first offensive of the U. S. forces in the Pacific. This flag was raised over the United States Capitol on 10 November 1943, the 168th Anniversary of the United States Marine Corps, as an answer to the reputed Japanese boast that the Rising Sun flag would fly over the capitol city while they dictated peace terms in the White House. After Guadalcanal, the Marines planted the Stars and Stripes on Bougainville and Tarawa, in November 1943; Cape Gloucester, New Britain, in December 1943; Marshall Islands in February 1944; Marianas Islands, in June and July 1944; Peleliu, in September 1944; Iwo Jima, in February 1945; Okinawa, in April 1945; and over a defeated Japan, in August 1945. The famous photograph of the flag-raising by Marines on Mount Surabachi, Iwo Jima, on 23 February 1945, made by an Associated Press photographer, Mr. Joseph Rosenthal, was chosen by the Treasury Department as the official symbol of the Seventh War Loan, and was the subject of a commemorative postage stamp. This historic flag was raised over the United States Capitol on 9 May 1945 by the three survivors of the original group. Marines are guarding the flag today in China and on the seven seas.



This universality of employment is a tradition handed down by the sea soldiers of Britain. Legend has it that Charles II having verified a tale of flying fish by questioning Sir William Killigren, colonel "of the newly raised maritime regiment on the foot," --- "glanced narrowly at the colonel's frank, weather-beaten face. Then with a laugh he turned to the secretary and said: 'From the very nature of their calling, no class of our subjects can have so wide a knowledge of seas and lands as the officers and men of our loyal maritime regiment. Henceforth, whenever we cast doubt upon a tale that lacketh likelihood we will tell it to the Marines - if they believe it, it is safe to say it is true.'"

Because of their mobility and availability Marines have been universally employed. From the very nature of their calling they are either on the spot where the trouble occurs, or are ready to embark for the center of the disturbance by the time the transport can get to the port of embarkation. Whether first to land to stop a fight, or "First to Fight", they must uphold their traditions for availability and mobility.

These traditions find expression in the familiar "Tell it to the Marines", "From the Halls of Montezuma," "First to Fight," "Join the Marines and See the World," and "The Marines Have Landed . . ." The appellation "Leatherneck" relates to the uniform. Why a "Leatherneck?" The use of the term with reference to the Marines is universal, but how many people

associate it with the uniform? The fact that early Marines wore a black leather stock gave rise to a name which has been current for several generations. Yet the first sailor who called a Marine a "Leatherneck" was unaware of the fact that thereby he started a tradition. It is said that at Belleau Wood, in June 1918, the Germans referred to U. S. Marines as "Devil Dogs", because of their fighting ability, tenacity, and unerring marksmanship, a name which continues to grow in popularity.

When First Lieutenant Presley N. O'Bannon returned from Tripoli in 1805 bringing with him a Mameluke sword presented to him by a former Bashaw of Tripoli, he did not realize that this sword would be the symbol of authority of Marine officers a hundred and forty-three years later, nor that a ship of the Navy would be named in his honor. The regulations can prescribe the weight, material, lines, and proportions of the sword, but they do not convey the significance of the sword nor paint the picture of the exploits of O'Bannon. Were it not for tradition the modern sword could be dispensed with. Its predecessor was a weapon, while the sword of today is a symbol.

In November 1868, a board of officers met to devise an appropriate insignia for the Marine Corps. They fixed upon the familiar globe and anchor surmounted by a spread eagle. This insignia embodies the tradition of the universal employment of Marines, their sea traditions, and the symbol of the nation itself.

Secretary of War James McHenry on 24 August 1797, prescribed the uniform of Marines to be recruited for the new ships DELAWARE, UNITED STATES, CONSTELLATION, and CONSTITUTION. Blue, red and gold was the color scheme then. The guard which paraded on the quarterdeck of the CONSTITUTION presented a more brilliant appearance, but the same blue, red, and gold parades the quarterdeck of the latest aircraft carrier at the call of "Full Guard and Band".

Marines are referred to as "hard-boiled". The press tells us so and the motion picture and radio capitalizes this quality. Yet Marines have made many landings in turbulent corners of the world and without firing a shot or being fired upon have actually prevented by their peaceful presence a great deal of bloodshed. For generations they have been performing the tasks where the instructions are not to fire unless fired upon. Their presence is peaceful in that their presence is respected, but the respect would not be there were there any indications of weakness on their part. From the BONHOMME RICHARD to Okinawa, the annals of the Marine Corps are filled with the accounts of strong men. No weaklings ever repelled a boarding party, captured a machine gun nest, or established a beachhead in the face of enemy opposition. Then the Marines are in fact "hard-boiled", but only when their mission requires it.

To a Marine the repelling of boarding attacks or the necessity of making his peaceful presence felt in out of



the way places where the rain, mud, and filth are the rule, has not exempted him from being traditionally neat and smart in appearance. An observer on John Paul Jones' ship remarked on the distinctive uniforms of the Marines and the smart evolutions through which the non-commissioned officers put the guard. When a Marine battalion was employed in suppressing the riots in 1877 their duties required their presence in several cities of Maryland and Pennsylvania. They were quartered at different times in depots, sheds, and under canvas, yet they found time for inspections and evening parades. The Army Medical Director of the Division of the Atlantic, who inspected the Marines at Reading, reported, . . . "I do not recollect ever having seen a more soldierly set of men. . . . It is quite remarkable that men performing such service are able to keep themselves and their arms, etc., so very clean and neat." Visit the Marine compartment of a battleship and you will find the Marine with his button board, his blanco and his pressing table. Or go to the embassy or legation guard of any country, surrounded by the rumblings of social and political upheavals, and you will find him brushing shoulders with the representatives of many nations and upholding his traditions.

The best blue uniform in the stateroom will not make a recruit look like a Marine, but as he develops, gains assurance, and imbibes some of the traditions of neatness and smartness, he begins to fit his uniform. He perhaps is

not conscious of the fact that he is obeying tradition, but he wants to be a Marine; he wears his uniform like the "top sergeant", who learned his "stuff" from some earlier "top sergeant" and so right on back to the Marine of the Revolution who paraded on the quarterdeck in readiness to repel boarders.

Precision is the accompaniment of neatness and smartness. Not only precision in the matter of dress and evolution, but in marksmanship. The mission of the Marine Corps has always demanded good shooting. There are many testimonials of the effectiveness of their fire against the enemy in the days of wooden ships. With the lengthening of the range of naval ordnance the necessity for rifle fire against enemy vessels has disappeared, but the necessity therefore on shore is still with us. In modern years this tradition has been built up until the Marine Corps Museum is filled with trophies won in rifle and pistol competitions.

Tradition has set a high physical standard for Marines. They must demonstrate the quality of physical endurance on the football field as well as in action. They must exemplify neatness, smartness, precision, and soldierly bearing on the parade ground and the quarterdeck as well as cleanliness in camp and, in an emergency, the ability to demand respect by their presence or shoot straight if the occasion requires it.

The mental and moral qualities of the United States Marine have been tested since the birth of our nation. All through the history of the Marine Corps there are examples of his versatility, trustworthiness, singleness, and tanacity of purpose, pride, discipline, courage, faithfulness and self-sacrifice.

"Necessity is the mother of invention". In the past, the nature of the duties performed by Marines and their limited numbers made versatility a necessary quality. There was not much room for overhead and specialization. In 1836, when Colonel Henderson was Commandant, he volunteered his services and those of the Corps to assist the Army in putting down the Indian uprisings in Florida. His offer was accepted and for a time the safeguarding of the navy yards was entrusted to civilian watchmen. Earlier Marines had fought pirates in the Barbary States, the West Indies and Quallah Battoo, and had brought the savages in Nooaheevah to terms. These Indian-fighting Marines acquitted themselves according to tradition and then went back to the navy yards. Down through the years, they served in barracks and aboard ship, guarded the mails, policed neutral zones in Nicaragua, ran the Gendarmerie d'Haiti, and protected American lives in China. Versatility is a tradition to the U. S. Marine.

With a reputation for versatility the U. S. Marine can be relied upon in an emergency. He has developed a

sense of responsibility, which means that he can be depended upon to do his part. He has proved himself trustworthy. The Mexican War furnishes two fine examples of the reliance of a commander on the tried qualities of Marines. In his march from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, General Scott established an important supply depot at San Augustine, to guard which he assigned part of General Quitman's division, which included a battalion of Marines. General Scott said of this assignment: "I regret having been obliged, on the 20th, to leave Major-General Quitman, an able commander, with a part of his division - the fine Second Pennsylvania Volunteers, and the veteran detachment of United States Marines - at our important depot, San Augustine. It was there that I had placed our sick and wounded, the siege-, supply-, and baggage-trains. If these had been lost the Army would have been driven almost to despair; and, considering the enemy's very great excess of numbers, and the many approaches to the depot, it might well have become, emphatically, the post of honor."

Later, Major Levi Twiggs, of the Marines commanded the volunteer party assigned to the assault of Chapultepec. With Major Twiggs were seventy Marines acting as pioneers and in his support was Lieutenant-Colonel Watson with the remainder of the Marine Battalion. Major Twiggs was killed in the assault, but his sacrifice was not in vain. It is said that after the war General Scott made the statement

that he had placed the Marines where the hardest work was to be accomplished and had never found his confidence misplaced.

The modern Marine does not concede anything in versatility to his predecessor, although he is now recognized as a specialist--in the art of amphibious warfare. In spite of the sceptics' "impossible," he developed his own concept of amphibious operations, and with it the unique organization to carry it through, the Fleet Marine Force. The technique used in the amphibious assaults of the many islands of the Pacific, of North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and France was conceived and developed by the Marines. Twice in the 1920's the guarding of the United States mails was entrusted to Marines. For nearly one hundred years Marines have been relied upon to protect the embassies, legations, and American citizens in foreign lands. They were given these jobs because they were traditionally trustworthy.

One cannot help but be impressed with the singleness of purpose with which Marines have performed the tasks designed them. They have been called upon to perform arduous and thankless duties in every part of the world. Yet, whether the Marines were suppressing pirates, protecting a banana plantation, safeguarding American lives in a foreign port, or fighting in a real war, they have always given their best. They know the true meaning of service and have performed it with a singleness and sincerity of purpose, in



keeping with the highest traditions, and yet their only reward is a task well done.

Singleness of purpose without tenacity would be of little military value. A century ago when war with Mexico was imminent and the acquisition of California by Great Britain was a possibility, President Polk felt it imperative to send instructions without delay to the American consul at Monterey, the senior naval officer afloat in Californian waters, and to Captain John C. Fremont, who was on an exploring mission in California. He selected Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie of the Marines as his confidential agent. Lieutenant Gillespie made his way across Mexico, disguised as a merchant, during the turmoil preceding the war, reported to Commodore Sloat on the *CYANE* at Mazatlan and proceeded thence to Monterey, where he communicated his instructions to Mr. Larkin, the consul. He found that Captain Fremont was somewhere in northern California and set out to find him. After a trek of six hundred miles through a strange country inhabited by unfriendly Indians, he located Fremont near the Oregon boundary and delivered his message. As far as can be gleaned from contemporary accounts, the instructions from President Polk were to resist any attempt at foreign acquisition of California and to encourage its annexation. It is history now that our western boundary was extended to the waters of the Pacific shortly thereafter, and Lieutenant Gillespie, by his courage and tenacity of purpose was largely instrumental

in setting at work the agencies which saved California to the United States. Modern methods of communication would have removed the necessity for Gillespie's perilous trip, but he has handed down to succeeding generations of Marines a tradition for tenacity of purpose which science and invention cannot improve upon. Lieutenant Gillespie possessed individual tenacity of purpose.

The Marines of the USS CUMBERLAND who stuck to their guns in the action with the MERRIMAC continued the fight from their sinking ship, despite the fact that the first shot from the MERRIMAC had killed nine of their number, illustrated a collective tenacity of purpose whose foundation was discipline.

The words of Commodore Shubrick, "The Marines have behaved with the fidelity and constancy which characterizes that valuable Corps, . . . "have a familiar ring. They referred to the conduct of Marines in the Pacific Squadron in the Mexican War, but the same sentiments had been expressed before and have since been embodied in the Marines' motto, "Semper Fidelis." In the greatest of all wars the Marines stood as they would stand, ever faithful. "Semper Fidelis" embodies a tradition which will last.

Pride of person and pride of accomplishment are qualities which are instilled in every Marine, and what better way can this be accomplished than by arousing in him the desire to emulate these qualities in his predecessors.

Pride is a heritage of Marines. The Marine has learned a sense of obligation to himself, to his comrades, to his commander, to his Corps, and to his Country.

Every tradition a Marine has is a tradition of the Marine Corps. Companies, battalions, regiments, and brigades have distinguished themselves, but their accomplishments have become traditions of the Corps as a whole. Marines have an "esprit de corps" which implies "sympathy, enthusiasm, devotion and a jealous regard for the honor of the body as a whole." And this spirit of oneness exists despite the fact that the Marines are scattered over half the face of the globe. The Marines are fortunate in that their traditions have given them an esprit de corps, a spirit of the whole.

In this respect the Navy resembles the Marine Corps. The Corps' traditions are bound up with those of the Navy. They differ in their adaptability. There is something incongruous in the consideration of a bluejacket in the trenches at Verdun and in the jungles of the Pacific although the Naval medical personnel and the Seabees were there. Yet the Marines adapted themselves to the trenches and the jungles as well as they ever did to the quarterdeck and the gun deck. The traditions of the Navy are mainly sea traditions; the Marine Corps' spring from accomplishments ashore as well as afloat. The Marine Corps also differs in its conception of discipline as handed down to it by tradition.

The Marine has always been the watch-dog of the ship, the backbone of the military organization, and to him has been entrusted the ceremonial details. This employment has left its imprint. The Marine knows he is a better soldier than the bluejacket, that he can handle himself better in the field and that he is given positions of trust over his ship-mates, yet he admires the spirit with which the bluejacket does a bluejacket's work. A Marine finds that a bluejacket, too, knows discipline.

The mission assigned the Marine Corps demands harmonious cooperation with the Navy. Understanding is necessary before cooperation is possible. The Marine aboard ship must be more than a policeman, a gunner or an ornament to the quarter-deck; he is there to learn to know the Navy, to imbibe its traditions, and inversely to induce a proper understanding of the mission of the Marine Corps and an appreciation of its traditions. It is too late to do this after the emergency arises. One may justly feel that the outcome of the Gallipoli expedition would have been far different had there been a proper understanding between the land and naval forces.

In an era of speed, progress, and invention, the modern Marine has come to appreciate the fact that "knowledge is power", and without it he could not uphold his traditions for availability, mobility, versatility, and efficiency. Their traditions demand that their methods keep step with progress. Without progress they could not remain faithful to their mission. Without a faithful fulfillment of their mission the Marine Corps would cease to exist.